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Note verbale dated 5 February 2015 from the Permanent Mission of Bangladesh to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

The Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of Bangladesh to the United Nations presents its compliments to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and has the honour to forward herewith, in its capacity as Chair of the Governing Council of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the text (in English and French) of the Outcome Document of the General Debate on the theme "Achieving gender equality, ending violence against women", adopted by the 131st Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, held in Geneva in October 2014, to the General Assembly (see annex).

The Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of Bangladesh to the United Nations requests the Secretary-General to circulate the present note verbale and its annex as a document of the sixty-ninth session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 27.

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Annex to the note verbale dated 5 February 2015 from the Permanent Mission of Bangladesh to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

[Original: English and French]

Outcome Document of the General Debate on the theme "Achieving gender equality, ending violence against women"

Endorsed by the 131st Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

(Geneva, 16 October 2014)

In October 2014, we members of parliament gathered at the 131st IPU Assembly on the theme: "Achieving gender equality, ending violence against women".

Gender equality is at the heart of progress, peace and development. If we are committed to achieving peace and security in the world, ending poverty and achieving sustainable development, we must tackle this issue head-on.

No country today can claim to have achieved gender equality. Women account for half the world's population, yet they make up only 21.8 per cent of parliamentarians worldwide, they continue to earn systematically less than men for the same work, and over 31 million girls are prevented from attending primary school. Gender inequality holds all our countries back, and the struggle to overcome it must therefore be a priority for each and every one of us, both men and women.

Today, the scourge of violence against women is a key issue in every country and internationally. No nation is spared; the latest global and regional estimates by the World Health Organization show that one out of every three women worldwide has experienced intimate partner violence or sexual violence by someone other than a partner.

Whether in the public or the private sphere, violence against women and girls in all its forms and manifestations robs them of their dignity, violates their fundamental rights, damages their health, reduces their productivity and prevents them from achieving their full potential. It also has significant consequences for peace and security and a negative impact on development. We strongly condemn all forms of violence against women and girls.

Gender inequality and violence against women feed on each other. On the one hand, it is impossible to achieve equality between men and women without putting an end to violence against women; on the other, women's vulnerability to violence is heightened by unbalanced power relations between men and women. In order to address this problem, we must take into account the broader context of women's lives and the need to secure respect for all their fundamental rights.

Addressing violence against women is a complex issue that requires profound change. It means looking at power relations; confronting patriarchy, which permeates all aspects of our societies; changing mentalities; and challenging the social roles and stereotypes that we have internalized, including those related to men. It also means enabling women to take ownership of their lives, their bodies and their destinies since women who are empowered, including economically, are less vulnerable to abuse.

There is no one solution for achieving gender equality and putting an end to violence against women; instead, there are a variety of approaches that reflect the diversity of situations and national experiences. It is nevertheless within the reach of parliaments to develop key strategies and responses. If we have the commitment and the will, progress is an achievable goal.

The commitment to achieving gender equality and eradicating violence against women must first translate into the development of strong, comprehensive legislation that is non-discriminatory, supports women's empowerment and addresses all forms of discrimination. This means a legal framework with no loopholes, one that provides for the implementation of temporary special measures to level the playing field and facilitates gender mainstreaming. It also means a framework that is consistent with States' commitments under the international instruments on human rights and gender equality to which they are parties, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

We need comprehensive legislation that criminalizes all forms of violence against women and includes provisions on prevention, protection and support for the survivors and prosecution and punishment of the perpetrators. It must also take into account and meet the needs of different groups of women, especially the most vulnerable, including girls, migrant women and refugee women. This is an area in which progress has been achieved; for example, two thirds of the world's countries now have laws criminalizing domestic violence.

Putting laws into practice remains the key challenge. Appropriate mechanisms must be envisaged in domestic law and budgets must be scrutinized to ensure that adequate financial and human resources are allocated to the effective implementation of legislation.

In order for laws to meet the needs of the survivors of gender-based violence, easily accessible services are fundamental. Several States have established women's shelters, hotlines and "one-stop crisis centres" that provide survivors of gender-based violence with legal, medical and counselling services. Investment in a justice system based on the protection of women survivors and their rights is vital; specialized courts on domestic violence and sexual offences are invaluable in that regard. In addition, law enforcement agencies must be trained to focus on the protection and dignity of the survivors and to secure criminal evidence so that more women will feel that it is safe for them to report violence and seek justice.

Enhanced implementation requires a coordinated community-based response to violence in which all stakeholders — including governments, parliaments, police, prosecutors, judges, health-care providers, social workers, women's organizations and religious and community leaders — have a role to play.

Awareness of the laws is also crucial. Legislation must be disseminated and made easy for people to obtain and understand, including through education, translation into local languages and public debates. For policies to be successful, sustained and effective awareness-raising campaigns are vital. All citizens, whether men or women, boys or girls, must understand that there is nothing private about violence and that it cannot be truly eliminated without an understanding that its tolerance in any form is unacceptable. In some countries, the support, cooperation and understanding of traditional leaders will be key to the success of any awareness-raising campaign.

It is essential to monitor the implementation of laws and policies. The oversight role of parliamentarians is key and must be strengthened, including by building partnerships across parties and with civil society movements. Information is also essential to the drafting and enactment of effective laws and the assessment of their impact. To that end we, as legislators, need to build our national statistical capacities and gather sex-disaggregated data and to focus particularly on the number of reported cases of violence against women and on the implementation of household surveys.

The specific situation of vulnerable groups should be taken into account and addressed as a priority. In particular, women's vulnerability to abuse and violence rises sharply in times of crisis. Women and girls are the main victims of situations of armed conflict, which, together with terrorist acts, insecurity and violence linked to drug trafficking, heighten their vulnerability and place them at greater risk of gender-based violence and abuse in the form of rape, kidnapping, forced and early marriage, exploitation and sexual slavery. Women's bodies are directly targeted by these horrifying crimes and by the increasing use of sexual violence as a weapon of war.

In light of the alarming reports of current violations of women's rights in conflict situations, we must condemn such acts publicly and denounce the use of religion and culture to justify them. We must also take urgent action at the national, regional and international levels to protect women and ensure that the survivors are given support, that they have access to justice and reparation and that the perpetrators are prosecuted. In this context, States must continue to fulfil their international obligations under the relevant human rights instruments and must implement in full United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), the Council's other resolutions on women, peace and security and general recommendation No. 30 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

Girls constitute another vulnerable group and face additional forms of violence, including female genital mutilation and other harmful practices, forced and early marriage, and murder in the name of so-called "honour". In developing countries, one third of all girls will be married before they turn 18 and 3.3 million girls are at risk of genital mutilation. In 50 per cent of cases, sexual attacks target girls aged 15 or even younger. Tailored responses to the specific needs of girls must be developed. As parliamentarians, we have the obligation to speak on their behalf and defend their right to a childhood free from fear and violence.

Change starts at birth. Education is a powerful equalizer; it is the key to transforming mentalities, addressing stereotypes and discrimination and building a culture of equality and tolerance. Girls' access to education is essential for their social and economic empowerment and security. Educating boys and girls on human rights and gender equality from an early age — for example, through the use of appropriate games, plays and stories — would help to instil non-violence and respect in relations between the sexes. Teaching and learning materials used in the schools must also be reviewed in order to remove stereotypes, and families must be engaged in order to raise awareness about women's rights and challenge social stereotypes. Parental education on women's rights and gender equality is also needed.

The media, including social media, can be major allies in educating and raising awareness. They must not perpetuate stereotypes and gender inequalities or appear

to condone violence against women. With today's media reporting on acts of violence against women around the world, more and more people are becoming outraged by these crimes and calling for an end to impunity.

Achieving gender equality and ending violence against women is the responsibility of both men and women. The potential is there, and men are part and parcel of the solution; they should take an active part in the debate and stand up for women's rights. The silent majority of non-violent men must speak out now and assume their responsibilities alongside women.

Women's voices must also be heard. Women in leadership positions have the power to take specific action in response to the interests of and challenges faced by other women whose voices are not being heard or taken into account. However, women are still poorly represented in leadership positions and their presence in decision-making bodies must be increased; to that end, the adoption of temporary special measures should be considered.

Effective change requires both a strong institutional framework and national bodies with the power to take action. We must build our parliaments' capacity to put an end to violence against women and to achieve gender equality. Implementation of the IPU Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments should serve as a reference as we introduce reforms and strengthen our institutions.

In 2015, we will turn the page on the Millennium Development Goals and celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action. The period 2015 to 2030 must be the final battle in the centuries-old fight for gender equality, and we must meet the challenge. As members of parliament, we vow to make that goal a reality.